

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 AID-05 OPR-02 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 DHA-02 OMB-01 /068 W  
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R 211250Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

CINCPAC HONOLULU

HRUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: PHRA SUKITTI KHACHARO (THANOM KITTIKHACHON)

REF: BANGKOK 26136

SUMMARY: CABINET MEETING SEPTEMBER 21 ON THANOM SITUATION BUT NO FIRM DECISIONS ARE EXPECTED. LEADERS OF THAI NATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTIES HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THAT THANOM HAS THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO REMAIN IN THAILAND. GROUP OF DEMOCRATS PUSHING FOR THANOM'S RETURN TO EXILE THIS TIME IN BODGAYA, INDIA. NSCT TAKING MODERATE STANCE BUT PREPARING FOR NATIONWIDE DEMONSTRATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT WILL DISCUSS PHRA SUKITTI KHACHARO'S (FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKHACHON) SITUATION AT THE REGULAR TUESDAY CABINET MEETING SEPTEMBER 21.

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ACCORDING TO SURIN MATSADIT MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE THE POINT TO BE DEBATED IS NOT WHETHER THANOM SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN THAILAND BUT HOW LONG HE SHOULD BE ALLOWED IN THAILAND FOR A FIXED TIME OR UNTIL THE DEATH OF HIS SERIOUSLY ILL 90-YEAR OLD FATHER.

2. THE GENERAL EXPECTATION IS THAT NO FIRM DECISIONS WILL BE REACHED AT THE MEETING. THE ROUND OF MEETINGS THAT PRIME MINISTER M.R. SENI PRAMOT HELD ON SEPTEMBER 20 WITH TOP MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND THE LEADERS OF THE COALITION PARTNERS PRODUCED NO DECISION ON WHAT TO DO WITH THANOM. ACCORDING TO THE SEPT 21 NATION DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS PRAMAN ADIREKSAN, LEADER OF THE THAI NATION PARTY AND THAWI CHUNLASAP, LEADER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY BOTH AGREED THAT THANOM SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTION.

3. HOWEVER, A GROUP OF DEMOCRAT MP'S WERE OF THE OPINION THAT THANOM SHOULD LEAVE THAILAND FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY. SURIN MATSADIT, GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN CHAIWAT TRAISUNAN, AND COMMERCE MINISTER DAMRONG LATTHAPHIPHAT, ALL FROM THE PROGRESSIVE FACTION OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, AGREED WITH THE SUGGESTION OF DEMOCRAT MP SAMPHAN THONGSAMAK OF NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, WHO SUBMITTED A LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF SEPTEMBER 20 THAT THE GOVERNMENT INVITE THANOM TO STAY AT THE THAI TEMPLE IN BODGAYA, INDIA. BODGAYA IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE HOLIEST PLACES IN BUDDHISM SINCE IT WAS THERE UNDER THE BODHI TREE THAT GAUTAMA BUDDHA ATTAINED ENLIGHTENMENT AND BECAME THE BUDDHA.

4. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL THE ACTIVIST STUDENTS HAVE SO FAR TAKEN A MODERATE STANCE ON THANOM'S PRESENCE IN THAILAND. THEY ARE HOWEVER PREPARING FOR DEMONSTRATIONS. THEY HAVE SENT OUT 5,000 STUDENTS INTO BANGKOK HOUSEHOLDS TO EXPLAIN THEIR POSITION ON THANOM AND TO TEST PUBLIC OPINION ON THE MATTER. THE LEADERS OF THE NSCT HAVE ALSO CONTACTED STUDENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LEADERS AT UNIVERSITIES THROUGHOUT THAILAND TO PREPARE FOR NATIONWIDE DEMONSTRATIONS.

5. BANGKOK AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY REMAIN VERY CALM. THERE IS NO SENSE OF CRISIS OR CONFUSION SUCH AS HUNG OVER BANGKOK DURING THE PRAPHAT AFFAIR AND THE SPATE OF RUMORS A MONTH AGO THAT THANOM WAS RETURNING SOON. THE NSCT, SENSING THE LACK OF

GENERAL SUPPORT FOR THE OUSTER OF THANOM AND THE DIFFICULTY OF ATTACKING A BUDDHIST MONK HAS TAKEN A MODERATE STANCE WHILE BUILDING UP SUPPORT FOR THE EXPECTED DEMONSTRATION BY DOING SO THEY EXPECT TO PUT THE ONUS OF ANY ACTION ON THE GOVERNMENT. THEY HAVE ALSO ATTEMPTED TO COUNTER THE BUDDHISM PROBLEM BY ATTACKING THANOM FOR USING RELIGION TO MASK HIS PERSONAL REASONS FOR HIS RETURN TO THAILAND.

6. THE DEMOCRATS ESPECIALLY THE PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS WILL NO DOUBT PUSH HARD FOR THANOM'S RETURN TO EXILE BUT WHETHER THEY SUCCEED WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE PUBLIC SUPPORT ENGENDERED BY THE ANTI-THANOM CAMPAIGN.  
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